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REFERENCES

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1 The 1950s occupy a special place in American political, social and cultural history as a time attesting that the twentieth century was indeed 'the American century,' a term famously coined by Henry Luce in 1941. The aftermath of World War II made it apparent that the US was the new superpower, a new empire manifested through military and political hegemony (hard power) and an equally hegemonic popular culture (soft power). This acknowledged superpower status brought about a new global awareness and dramatic domestic changes in the US that have continuously attracted the attention of scholars from various fields. Various pertinent inquiries, too many to bring in here, justify the existing literature on this important decade that, more often than not, revisit that past to find clues that might help understand our complicated present. This is precisely what the editors of this book do in its introduction. In these opening pages of *It Came from the 1950s! Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties* the editors explain the interrelated questions elicited by its title: "Why the 1950s? Why America? Why popular culture? And why this sense of anxiety?" (3), wide-ranging questions that string together the various essays that make up this volume in their attempt to provide some partial answers. Agreeing upon the historical parameters of this long decade as a period spanning from 1946 to 1964, the authors and contributors of this eclectic and perceptive collection ground their essays on the hypothesis that "popular culture documents provide unique

insights into the concerns, anxieties and desires" (3) concealed by the decade's dominant view of affluence, suburban security and unprecedented consumption. Through their common use of symbols and metaphorical forms, popular culture documents obliquely articulate the undercurrents of anxiety veiled by the veneer of material prosperity so dominant in those years. Quite expectedly, cinema, amongst the many popular aesthetic media of the twentieth century, occupies a central part in this collection. In their succinct but excellent contextualization of the period, the editors remind readers of the importance of 1950s popular culture, which not only shaped the minds of a generation that, for the first time, have grown up 'immersed' in popular culture within the home but it also influenced the high-cultural formulations of fine art, as in the well-known case of the Pop Art movement. This contextualization also brings in the voices of some contemporary commentators to explain what precisely it was that Americans were more openly anxious about: nuclear weapons and juvenile delinquency. But the essays in this volume do not relegate their interest in disclosing fears and anxieties to those plaguing the United States in this decade. They also include some essays about the powerful anxieties beneath the surface of everyday life in Britain, deployed through the metaphorical and symbolic forms of popular culture documents. This inclusion is explained by the fact that the decade that brought the US to the status of global superpower also made apparent the decline of Britain as a global-imperial power. The cultural and historical trajectories of these two nations were inextricably connected.

2 The first half of the book combines accounts of British and American popular culture in an attempt to create a dialogic relationship between them. The first six essays focus on Science Fiction and Horror since, as the editors explain, these two genres articulated nuclear fears most readily. Two of them are revised and expanded versions of classic essays by two renowned scholars on cinematic popular culture. Initially published in his book *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture* (1997), David J. Skal's "A-Bombs, B-Pictures, and C-Cups" deals with fears about technology, scientific knowledge and fast-growing military development expressed through anxious images about science and technology that flooded American popular culture at the time. Here, this celebrated author of Gothic and Horror convincingly establishes connections between images that the common reader would deem apparently unrelated. In the same light, Kim Newman's essay, "Mutants and Monsters," previously published in *Millennium Movie* (1999), focuses on the anxieties caused by nuclear warfare displayed in a series of unforgettable science-fiction monsters created by both the American and Japanese film industry as two distinctive responses to nuclear destruction. A different approach is given by Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston who in their essay study the reception of Science Fiction Film and TV during the 1950s to revise some of the given assumptions of the genre, showing how genre labeling changes between media and across periods, and quite often conflicting "within" the specific periods themselves. In their analysis of contemporary reviews and film comments they also argue that special effects and self-conscious artificiality along with inventiveness occupied a central appeal to the original audience of 50s sci-fi. This essay is exemplary in the manner in which it approaches the instabilities of genres as categories, always debatable and in conflict, to define films and other popular cultural artifacts.

3 These two essays are interlinked with three articles on British popular artifacts of the decade. Darryl Jones analyses a British-American co-production, *Night of the Demon* (1957), in the context of the decline of the British Empire to establish a nexus with traditional

structures of feeling over an unstoppable progressivist techno-modernity while identifying a clash of pre-modern metaphysics and techno-rational modernity in the film. The other two analyze the Hammer horror of the fifties and complement each other in interesting ways. Wayne Kinsey's "'Don't Dare See It Alone!' The Fifties Hammer Invasion" explores the impact of Hammer horror in the 1950s, which with its innovative combination of horror and sex was considered a threat to public decency at the time, but since then has become staple of the genre. In "Hammer's *Dracula*" leading scholar Christopher Frayling offers an illuminating reading of the film by highlighting its connections with the British Gothic tradition that challenges the customary interpretations of post-1970s criticism of the sub-discipline of 'Dracula Studies'. This particular reading serves Frayling to defend the rightful place of the Hammer's collection as part of the British "national heritage."

4 The essays of the second part of the book are concerned with other anxieties, some still more subtly connected to the overwhelming concern with nuclear destruction. Elizabeth McCarthy focuses on juvenile delinquency panics, specifically on the image of the female juvenile delinquent that pervaded pulp fiction and exploitation movies. Shocking large-breasted, "thrill-seeking" women saturating popular culture artifacts incarnated a rebellious and destabilizing sexual energy that threatened the 1950s domestic ideology founded on distinct role models for men and women. In her essay McCarthy provides an interesting historical trajectory of the term "female juvenile delinquent" to underline the new significance taken in the post-war years. Equally useful for any curious reader is the impressive amount of references across different popular culture media and artifacts mentioned and examined in the essay to demonstrate the pervading presence of this figure and its underlying fears. In relation to the importance of the sexual politics of this long decade, Kevin Corstorphine looks at the short fiction of Robert Block, the creator of Norman Bates, to discuss issues concerning 1950s masculinity and to invite us to reconsider received notions of sexual politics in pulp fiction.

5 In line with the well-known importance of the nuclear family in the nuclear age, extensively examined by Elaine Tyler May in her pioneering and influential work *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), Dara Dawney's essay studies the trope of the suburban home in the work of Shirley Jackson. The suburban home gained a new symbolic importance in the 1950s, because, as the editors quite rightly recall in the introduction, "The Civil Defense movement of the 1950s encouraged all Americans to become Cold Warriors, emphasizing the fact that, for most citizens, the frontline of the battle against communism was the home front" (11). The suburban home then was presented as a kind of private shelter from the dangers of the outside world, but at the same time perceived as highly vulnerable, "revealing unexpected anxieties about the nature of community in the new suburbs, in small-town American and in the big cities" (11). In Shirley Jackson's work the suburban home becomes a Gothic house, which Dawney analyzes using the discoveries of 1950s anthropology to examine "its repeated concerns with ritual and myth, purity and danger," embodied in this archetypal generic trope. The anthropological thinking and the related literary criticism of the 'Myth and Ritual' school of the 1950s that Jackson was familiar with provide Dawney with new interpretative possibilities to read the ambiguous work of this writer and in particular the general concern with the relationship between the individual and the wider culture in her writing. The domestic space and the anxieties over consumer products in Sylvia Plath's poetry constitute the object of analysis in Lorna Piatti-Farnell's essay. The Gothic

nature of the domestic elements in Plath's poetry resonates, according to this author, "her conflicting feelings about gender roles in commodity culture" (198). In her analysis of Plath's writing Piatti-Farnell seeks to uncover attitudes toward women's role in Cold War America that were veiled in the politics of the so-called "kitchen culture."

6 Quite fittingly, the essay that closes this volume recaps the significance of revisiting this decade today, already specified by the editors in the introduction. Bernice Murphy's very interesting essay examines two of the latest film revisions of the suburban 1950s: Todd Haynes' homage to the lush melodramas of Douglas Sirk in *Far From Heaven* (2003) and Andrew Currie's horror/comedy *Fido* (2006). These are just two examples of an ongoing series of works that recreate received notions of the 1950s suburban stability to deal with contemporary sensibilities and cultural differences. Although the comparison of these two 1950s "re-imaginings" in both films is Murphy's main objective in this essay, she also assesses the creative potentials of revisionism itself by looking at the most important recreations of the 1950s in American cinema and television over the past 40 years.

7 By referring to Sirk's melodramas and to the other film genres this last essay reminds us, however, of the significance of genres other than science fiction and horror when it came to dealing with fears and anxieties of this decade, or of any other for that matter, which could have been given more space in the volume. More specifically, film noir and science fiction are identified in the introduction as "the two defining genres of 1950s cinema," but the volume mainly focuses on science fiction and horror, neglecting other equally important film genres – film noir and melodrama, for instance – to convey anxieties and fears of the decade. The unequal attention given to popular culture genres and the eclecticism noted in the volume can be explained by the fact that the collection is the result of a conference on 1950s popular culture held in Trinity College Dublin in May 2008. This understandable shortcoming, however, allows for an in-depth treatment of key popular culture genres like sci-fi and horror. *It Came from the 1950s!* deserves a wide readership of an important cultural era and its cultural artifacts that may provide clues towards an understanding of the anxieties of our contemporary threats, articulated in the many vampires and monsters that inundate the screens and pop literature today.

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